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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 001802

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV BG

SUBJECT: 50 INJURED IN ANTI-AHMADIYA ATTACKS

Classified By: P/E Counselor D.C. McCullough, reasons para 1.4 b, d.

¶1. (SBU) On April 17, around 15,000 activists of the International Khatme Nabuat Movement (INKMB), a militant group dedicated to declaring Ahmadiyas non-Muslim, marched on an Ahmadiya mosque in Satkhira, in south-western Bangladesh, according to local media and Ahmadiya leaders. The marchers, brandishing sticks, machetes, and darts, tried to replace the mosque's sign with one saying it was "A place of worship for the Ahmadiya community, no Muslim should mistake it for a mosque."

¶2. (SBU) When Ahmadiyas tried to keep them at bay, marchers started throwing stones. Police, who were out in force, intervened at that point. In the presence of the local Police Deputy Inspector General and the local magistrate, the crowd handed over its sign to the police who, according to photos, hung the new sign themselves. The demonstrators then began looting Ahmadiya homes. Ahmadiyas charge police did nothing to stop the attacks.

¶3. (SBU) Later that night, Ahmadiya Jamaat officials told us, there were attacks on Ahmadiya homes in four neighboring Ahmadiya villages, and on April 18 a crowd armed with sticks advanced towards the villages but later withdrew. Approximately 20 policemen are now guarding the Ahmadiya area in Satkhira. Ahmadiya leaders have yet to decide whether to file a case, as requested by the police, against the attackers, in part because they believe the police themselves should take that step.

¶4. (SBU) Over 50 persons were injured in the various attacks; two, both women, are hospitalized.

¶5. (C) Comment: This appears to be the most violent assault on Ahmadiyas since October 29, when 11 Ahmadiyas were injured as extremists tried to capture an Ahmadiya mosque in Brahmanbaria district, 60 miles northeast of Dhaka. Police, at the direction of the BDG, became more active after Brahmanbaria in protecting Ahmadiyas, but now seem to have reverted to the old pattern of complicit passivity. We will raise our concerns later this week with senior BDG officials, who will likely again argue that police action effectively defused an explosive situation and that the BDG's priority must be respecting public order and "sensitivities" of the majority.

THOMAS